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AMERICAN IS FREED WITH HELP OF SYRIA

Educator Abducted in Lebanon and Taken to Iran Is Home

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WASHINGTON, July 21 — David S. Dodge, the acting president of American University in Beirut who was kidnapped last year, has been freed with the help of Syrian leaders, the White House said today.

The officials declined to give details but Administration officials said that Mr. Dodge had been held for at least the last six months in Iran.

He was seized in Beirut on July 19, 1982, by pro-Iranian Shiite Moslems, taken to Syria and then moved on to Iran.

Brother Heads Security Force

The United States asked the Syrians to intervene with the Iranians to help arrange the release of Mr. Dodge, the officials added.

The White House said that the United States "is grateful to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and to Rifaat al-Assad for the humanitarian efforts they undertook which led to Mr. Dodge's release."

Rifaat, younger brother of the Syrian President, is in charge of a security force that keeps tight control over opponents of the Assad regime.

Mr. Dodge was flown to Frankfurt, West Germany, this morning, the officials reported, and then was taken by the Air Force to the United States. The White House said that Mr. Dodge had been examined by a State Department doctor and found to be in excellent physical health.

The release came as President Amin Gemayel of Lebanon was meeting with

Secretary of State George P. Shultz, in advance of his session with President Reagan on Friday.

Mr. Gemayel, speaking at a news conference this morning, inveighed against Syria for its recent shelling of Beirut and its refusal so far to agree to withdraw its troops from Lebanon. By refusing to pull out, Syria is blocking Israeli fulfillment of its commitment to a withdrawal agreement with Lebanon.

Details of Mr. Dodge's kidnapping, captivity and release are still sketchy. The State Department asserted that its refusal to provide more information was at the request of Mr. Dodge and his family. The family home is in Princeton, N. J.

Mr. Dodge, who is 61 years old, was born in Beirut, the son of a former president of American University, Bayard Dodge, and grandson of Daniel Bliss, founder of the university.

He had been acting president of the university since July 1981 — living alone in his residence on the campus — when he was seized by gunmen as he was walking home from his office.

American officials said it is believed that he was taken by pro-Iranian Shiite militants, members of the Amal Islamic movement led by a former teacher, Hussein Musavi, and taken at first to Baalbek, a town in the Bekaa region of eastern Lebanon.

This area is under control of Syrian forces, but there are also about 350 Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards there.

The Amal Islamic movement is believed to be closely linked to the Iranian intelligence service and to the Syrian security forces headed by Rifaat al-Assad.

Whereabouts in Iran a Secret

According to reports received here earlier in the year, Mr. Dodge was thought to have been taken from Lebanon to Syria and then to Iran. Officials said they did not know with certainty where he had been held in Iran or why the Iranians kept his presence a secret.

At the time of the abduction, Mr. Dodge was believed to have been taken in retaliation for a reported seizure by Lebanese Christian Phalangists of

three Iranian diplomats in Beirut, including the chargé d'affaires, Mohsin Musavi — no relation to Hussein Musavi.

Nothing more has been heard of the three Iranians and it is believed they were slain.

One Administration official said that Mr. Dodge could have been taken to Iran by intelligence agents without the direct knowledge of the Iranian Government or of the country's leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

The report of Mr. Dodge's confinement in Iran recalled the ordeal of the American diplomats and embassy staff members held captive in Teheran for 444 days, from Nov. 4, 1979 to Jan. 20, 1981.

"Dr. Dodge, who in the Middle East represents American education and culture, would have been a big fish for the Iranians, who have been fighting against American influence ever since they overthrew the Shah," a State Department official commented.

Good Publicity for Damascus

Officials said that the Syrians were probably willing to help arrange Mr. Dodge's release to offset poor publicity they have received in the United States for refusal to go along with troop withdrawal in Lebanon, and for their close military ties to the Soviet Union.

The State Department would not say where Mr. Dodge was taken after his return to the United States or when he might speak to journalists.

Mr. Gemayel, in his talks with Mr. Shultz, focused on possible ways of persuading the Syrians to agree to a formula for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Lebanon.

The Lebanese are urging the Reagan Administration to take more active steps to bring about the Syrian agreement. Foreign Minister Elie Salem of Lebanon said that the United States should raise the matter with the Soviet Union and continue to talk directly with the Syrians.

In his meeting with reporters, Mr. Gemayel said he was surprised by Syria's refusal to withdraw its troops in Lebanon.

"Nothing in the course of these negotiations led us to believe that Syria's position would be so vehement," he said.

When asked about the recent shelling of Beirut, Mr. Gemayel said: "I don't know when the Syrians will stop such kinds of neo-terrorism."

"I know one thing," he said. "If they will not stop such kind of action, those bombs, they will return to Damascus."

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